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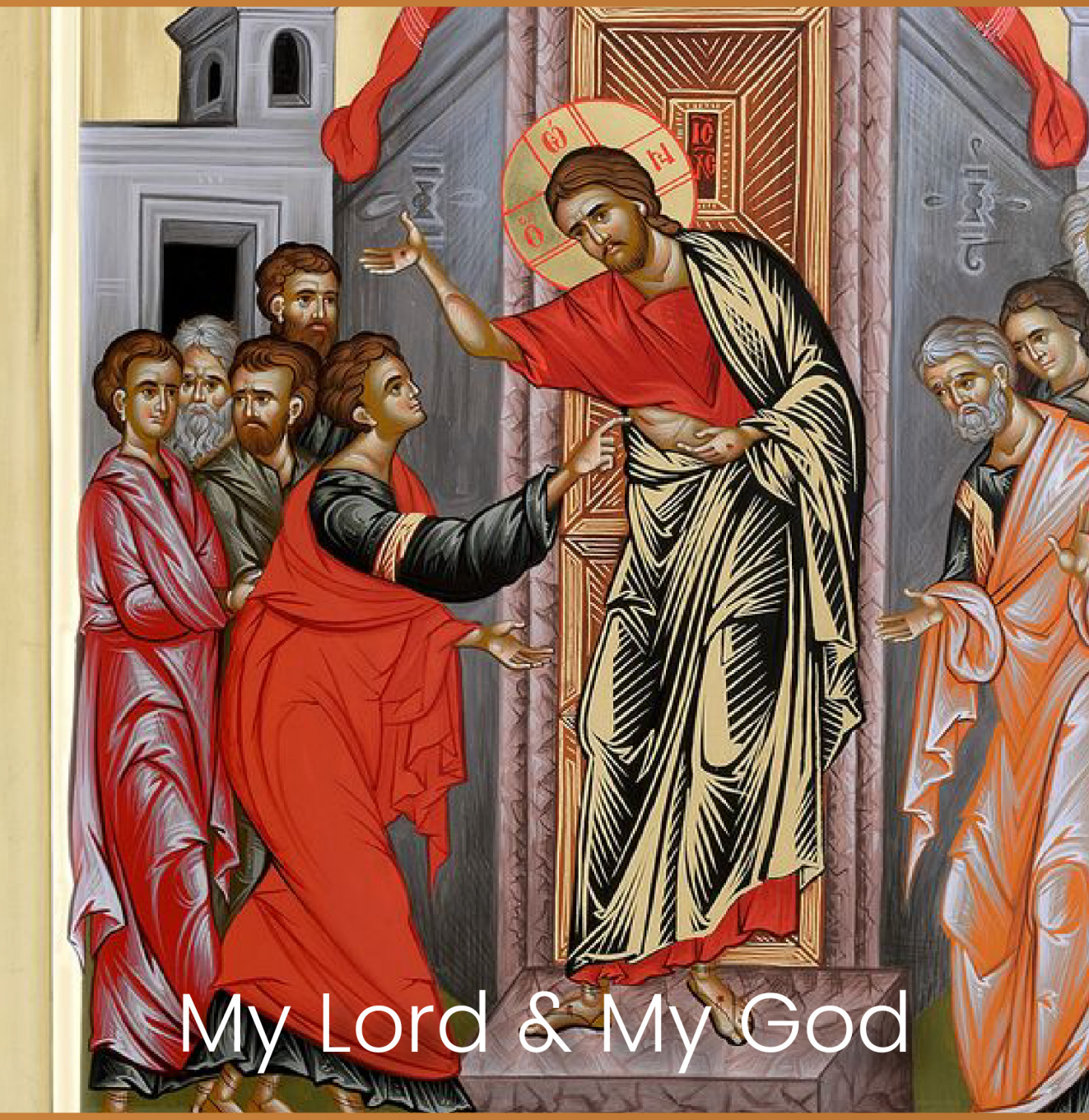

My Lord & My God

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The Malankara Sabha

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VOLUME 4 ISSUE 3

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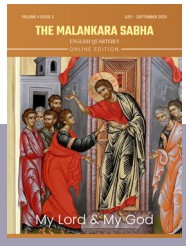

July 3
Dukhrono of St. Thomas

His Holiness Writes...

Beloved in Christ,

We have been preparing this message against the backdrop of a tragic plane crash that shocked and saddened the entire world. We express our profound grief and deep sorrow at the untimely loss of so many precious human lives. This sudden and heart-breaking incident has plunged many families into inconsolable grief. We stand in prayerful solidarity with them during this hour of pain and loss. On behalf of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and its faithful across the world, we offer our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families. “The Lord is near to the broken-hearted and saves the crushed in spirit.” (Psalm 34:18). We pray that the Almighty God will grant them strength and comfort as they pass through this valley of tears. May the souls of the departed rest in eternal peace, and may divine consolation surround all who mourn.

Another major concern is the alarming increase in the magnitude of drug abuse in today’s world. In-depth studies reveal that the situation in India is grave and dangerous. According to reports published jointly by reliable sources

like the United Nations and the Government of India, millions of Indians are addicted to alcohol, cannabis, opium, heroin, and other synthetic drugs. It also revealed that 'substance use' among adolescents in Kerala is increasing rapidly, with 31.8% of students in Central Kerala using substances, like alcohol, smoking, or pan.

It is with deep pastoral concern and commitment that we inaugurate 'DRUXIT'—a dedicated initiative of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church to combat the growing menace of drug addiction and substance abuse that threatens the very fabric of our families, communities, and our beloved nation. Through DRUXIT, we declare a collective NO TO DRUGS and a passionate YES to life, health, dignity, and God's purpose for every human being.

The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church will henceforth actively undertake a four-pronged plan of action which includes: *Launching awareness programs* in church, spiritual organizations, church-run educational institutions and at home; *Establishing support systems*, including counseling centers and rehabilitation referral services, under the auspices of our diocesan councils; *Strengthening families* with Christian values, nurturing environments where love, dialogue, and guidance become the first defenses against addiction as 'Awareness begins at home'; and *Empowering our clergy and lay leaders* to recognize early signs of addiction and intervene with compassion and pastoral care.

Let us teach our children the joy of holy living, the strength of discipline, and the beauty of a life lived for God and neighbor. 'DRUXIT' is not just a program—it is a movement of love, of protecting our youth and of nurturing them into the fullness of the stature of Christ.

May the Almighty God bless this initiative, strengthen all our endeavors, and grant healing to those who suffer.

May God's grace lead us forward.

Baselios Marthoma Mathews III

Editorial

History bears witness to both 'saving lights' and 'destructive lights.' On August 6th, according to the ancient Christian tradition, we celebrate the Feast of the Saving Effulgence of Light. This significant feast, observed every year on August 6th, is the Feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ. It commemorates the event when Jesus shone brighter than the sun, on Mount Tabor, and Moses and Elijah, who had passed away centuries before Jesus, appeared with Him in the glory and radiance of the dazzling light.

August 6th also marks the memory of the most devastating 'light', history has ever seen in modern times. It is the anniversary of the 1945 Hiroshima nuclear bomb explosion, which led to the death of over a hundred thousand people and the suffering of countless more. Destructive flashes of light are still going on. Thousands are being incinerated in the devastating fires of bombs and missiles unleashed by Russia in Ukraine, Ukraine in Russia, Israel in Gaza and other neighbouring countries. Each country and channel attempts to celebrate the 'achievements' of the destructive lights of missiles and bombs caused to the enemy, by releasing videos. This is also a furious and dangerous time, as we stand at the brink of a nuclear war that is capable of burning the world to ashes.

Everyone enjoys the breathtaking spectacle of fireworks in the sky. Similarly, when channels celebrate and the world enjoys the impact-lights of bombs and missiles, it is immensely cruel and a chilling sign of human indifference to overlook the tears of millions who are plunged into the depths of suffering by these destructive weapons of war.

The purpose of feasts like the Feast of Transfiguration and all holy sacraments, especially the Holy Qurbana, is to draw attention to Christ, the Light of Truth, who inspires humanity and gives hope to the world. The disciples who witnessed the experience of Christ being transfigured in the radiant glory of His divinity, also testified to hearing the voice of the Heavenly Father. It was a heavenly voice commanding them to obey Christ, His beloved Son. That divine wisdom is the light that liberates the world from the overshadowing darkness of suffering, hatred, communalism, and war.

It was American President Truman who gave the green light to drop the nuclear bomb on Hiroshima. When protests against the Hiroshima bombing arose in America itself, Dorothy Day, an American journalist and social activist, responded by saying that 'we should not obey Truman, but Christ, the True Man and True God.' Our future will be bright if we sincerely focus on that Light of Truth and Divine Wisdom, which overcomes the darkness of all forms of sin, ignorance, injustice and violence, and leads us to a world order where love, justice, and peace prevail.

As materialism, which teaches that only the world experienced by the senses is real, gains strength, the light of transfiguration illuminates our thinking, guiding us beyond such narrow perspectives. The invisible Father's voice, the luminous presence of Moses and Elijah, the light of the cloud, and Christ, radiant from uncreated light, all combined to give Peter, James, and John, representatives of humanity, a vision of spiritual dimensions beyond the narrow materialistic world view.

Regarding that unique moment when the unseen world entered and intersected with the seen world, Peter the Apostle wrote: "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty." (2 Peter 1:16)

The fire in the burning bush that Moses saw, the pillar of fire that guided God's people in the wilderness, and the 'tongues of fire' that descended upon the early Christian community at Pentecost, were all not destructive but a form of love that reveals, guides, and transforms. The light of the transfiguration on Mount Tabor is a much more powerful experience of this. Even in the darkness generated by the violent explosion lights and the darkness of hateful thoughts within, let us look at that True Light and be illumined to be radiant manifestations of God's love, wisdom, and purity.

Bijesh Philip Achen

THE WAY OF THE PILGRIM

A Reflection on the Eschatological Calling of Orthodox Life

Fr. Dr. Ninan V. George

"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."

Philippians 3:20

Walking the Pilgrim Path

Imagine you are on a long journey: not just a holiday trip, but on a sacred path with a destination beyond time and space. This is how Orthodox Christianity sees human life. We are not permanent residents of this world; we are pilgrims, journeying towards our true homeland, which is with God.

St. Paul reminds us in Philippians 3:20 that our real citizenship isn't in any nation or earthly institution, but in heaven. As Orthodox Christians, we are called to live with our eyes fixed on that eternal destination, shaped by the life of Christ, the witness of the saints, and the liturgy of the Church.

The Pilgrimage Theme in the Bible and of the Church Fathers

The pilgrimage theme isn't new. It is woven through the Bible. Think of Abraham, who left his homeland and lived in tents, trusting God's promise of a better, heavenly city. As Hebrews 11:13–16 says, he and the other patriarchs "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." This same truth is echoed by the early Church Fathers.

St. John Chrysostom reminds us: "The Christian must be a stranger to the world, having nothing in common with its desires." This doesn't mean we should hate the world. It means we do not build our ultimate hopes on temporary things like possessions, pleasure, or fame. St. Basil the Great warns us not to turn back to "Egypt" (a symbol of worldly comfort) when the Promised Land lies ahead. For him, Christian life is a journey forward, not backward. We are meant to keep moving spiritually, pressing on toward God.

The Temptation to Settle Down Spiritually

In today's fast-paced and comfort-driven world, it is easy to lose sight of our spiritual destination. We often settle into routines, pursuing success, comfort, or recognition as though this life were the final stop. But Christ's teaching disrupts that illusion. He says in Matthew 6:33: "Seek first the Kingdom of God..." And again, in Luke 16:13: "You cannot serve both God and money." These teachings challenge us to reorder our priorities. For those living in the diaspora or in pluralistic societies, the temptation to "belong" to this world can be especially strong. But St. Paul reminds us that we are citizens of another realm. We live here, but we live with our hearts aimed toward heaven.

Christ as the Model Pilgrim

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the perfect model of the pilgrim life. Though He is eternal, He entered our world as one who did not belong. As the Gospel of John says: "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him." (John 1:11). St. Gregory the Theologian describes the Incarnation as a divine journey: a descent

into our condition, a pilgrimage of love. Christ, the Son of God, became poor, homeless, and rejected so that we might become rich in grace and find our true home in God. For Orthodox Christians, to follow Christ is to walk the path He walked: a path marked by humility, sacrifice, and hope. Baptism starts our pilgrimage. The Eucharist feeds us along the way. The saints cheer us on. And the Church, like-wise a loving mother, carries us when we falter.

Hospitality – Welcoming Fellow Pilgrims

One of the most beautiful aspects of Christian pilgrimage is that we don't walk alone. And we're called not just to journey ourselves, but to welcome others along the way. Jesus said: "I was a stranger, and you welcomed me..." (Matthew 25:35). In the Orthodox tradition, hospitality (philoxenia) is a divine virtue. To welcome others, especially the vulnerable and the outsider, is to welcome Christ Himself. When we open our hearts and homes to others, we mirror the love of God who has made room for us in His Kingdom. So, the question is not just "Am I walking with God?" but also, "Am I helping others walk too?"

Struggle and the Cross – The Cost of the Journey

Every true pilgrimage has its hardships. Being a pilgrim means accepting discomfort, detours, and challenges. The Cross is not an exception to our journey: it is central to it. "Through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). St. Isaac the Syrian says: "Without the Cross, love is not possible. Without pain, there is no ascent." Struggles test us. But they also transform us. Like clay in the hands of the Potter, our hardships shape our souls. Each trial reminds us that we are not home yet and deepens our desire for God.

Our Destination – The Age to Come

We do not journey toward a vague spirituality or abstract reward. We journey towards a face-to-face communion with Christ. St. Silouan the Athonite, known for his deep spiritual insight, gave this mysterious but hope-filled counsel: "Keep your mind in hell and do not despair." In other words: be honest about the pain and brokenness of life, but never lose hope. Why? Because our destination is joy. The Kingdom is not a myth. It is the fulfilment of all creation. It is already breaking into our lives through the Divine Liturgy, the beauty of icons, the mystery of the sacraments, and the love of Christ's Body, the Church. Philippians 3:20 once again becomes our guiding star: "Our citizenship is in heaven..."

Walk as Pilgrims

So, what does this mean for you and me? It means we live with a light grip on worldly things. It means we practice generosity and humility. It means we pray with longing and act with love. It means we remind ourselves and each other that we are not passing through aimlessly, but joyfully, toward the Kingdom of God.

Let us walk, not as those who fear the journey, but as those who know the way because Christ has gone before us, and the Church walks beside us. We are not just strangers on the earth, we are also heirs of the Kingdom.

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- St. Isaac the Syrian, Ascetical Homilies (Holy Transfiguration Monastery)
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(Rev. Fr. Dr. Ninan V. George is the General Secretary of the St. Thomas Orthodox Vaidika Sanghom)

"BEHOLD THE MAN": ENCOUNTERING CHRIST IN ECCE HOMO

Simon Philips

On Good Friday, April 8, 1966, Time magazine broke with tradition. For the first time in its history, the cover featured no image - only three words on a black background, printed in bold red letters: "Is God Dead?" This provocative question echoed the declaration of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who had famously proclaimed, "God is dead, and we have killed him." Nietzsche argued that modern humanity, in its self-absorption and pride, had rendered God irrelevant. The rise of scientific rationalism and the separation of Church from state, he claimed, had eliminated society's need for divine authority. Perhaps even more telling is what one Jesuit theologian called "the atheism of distraction" - where people are simply too preoccupied with their daily pursuits to consider God's place in their lives.

This exaltation of human self-sufficiency reached its peak in Nietzsche's own autobiography, which he boldly titled "Ecce Homo", the very words Pontius Pilate used when presenting Jesus to the crowd - "Behold the man." Through this work, Nietzsche not only declared God dead but elevated himself to Christ-like status. Today, we may not pen autobiographies, but we curate our lives on social media and other platforms, projecting self-importance in a way that mirrors Nietzsche's prideful stance.

The Church redirects our gaze from human pride to the profound image of a humiliated Christ in Ecce Homo (Behold the Man). In the Gospel reading at the conclusion of the Third Hour prayers of the Good Friday liturgy, we hear these solemn words: John 19:5 – So Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!"

The Good Friday morning Sedro deepens our meditation through a striking contrast between heaven and earth. The church fathers present us with this profound paradox: The One who is dressed in light as a mantle in the heights above, has put on a robe of shame below! The One who is in the heights above, The King of Kings and one who plaits crowns for the rulers, was crowned with a crown of thorns here below.

In the Sacrament of Matrimony, the Church invokes the depiction of Ecce Homo during the blessing of the crown, powerfully reminding the bridegroom that he is called

to embody the humility and self-sacrifice of Christ, who bore a crown of thorns. This sacred symbolism emphasizes that the bridegroom's role is to mirror Christ's example of love and devotion, reflecting the divine image even amidst the trials of earthly life. (Manavallan than Makudam, Thiru Mull-mudi-yode Sadharshayam).

"Behold the Man!" Pilate's words echo through history—not as the introduction of a criminal, but as the revelation of the Man. These words echo an earlier proclamation at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, when John the Baptist declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."

Both men encountered Christ in starkly different circumstances—John in his humble camel's hair garment and Pilate in his fateful confrontation with Jesus who was clothed in the mocking robes of a false king. Yet, in their own ways, both recognized and proclaimed a profound truth. Their exclamations, "Behold!" are not mere introductions; they are invitations to see Christ as He truly is, the perfect man, sinless and pure, the unblemished Lamb who takes our place.

Here stands the True God of True God, Light of Light, humbling Himself beyond measure, a man of profound substance, a man of unfathomable depth.

Centuries before Pilate's proclamation, the prophet Isaiah had already painted this portrait of the suffering Messiah: "He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity... Surely He has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted Him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted." (Isaiah 53:2-4)

Isaiah's prophetic vision aligns perfectly with this moment – the divine King stands before Pilate, not in heavenly splendor, but in human frailty. The one whom Pilate presents as "the man" is precisely as Isaiah foresaw: bearing our grief, carrying our sorrows, wounded for our transgressions. This is true beauty, true substance – not in outward appearance, but in sacrificial love.

This wisdom transcends cultures and ages. Consider the exchange between a British official and Swami Vivekananda. When asked, "Why can't you wear a jacket, shirt and tie and look like a gentleman?" Vivekananda responded with profound wisdom: "In your culture, a tailor makes a gentleman; but in ours, character makes a gentleman."

The church draws a comparison between those with true substance and inner beauty and those who lack it. Every day, as we recite the Nicene Creed, we mention the names of two individuals. Interestingly, John the Baptist, Moses, and Elijah go unnamed, yet Mary and Pilate are specifically mentioned. Why is this so? Pilate, despite knowing the truth, rejected it for worldly gains. In contrast, Mary, a young girl embraced the angel's revealed words, fully aware that she had everything to lose. She exercised her free will to discern what is substantive and what is superficial. This distinction highlights the profound difference between rejecting the truth for temporary benefits and embracing it despite significant personal risk.

So, we must look beyond outward appearances and ask ourselves: 'Are we merely whitewashed tombs, or are we striving to be men and women of inner beauty and substance?' This profound moment between Pilate and Jesus offers us three vital points for contemplation. The scene echoes Zechariah's prophecy we read during Hosanna: (Zechariah 9:9) "Behold, your King comes riding on a colt." Now, in Pilate's chamber, the question emerges:

"Are you the king of Jews?" (Mathew 27:11). Jesus responds with his own question: "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say this about me?" (John 18:34).

First, we must examine what we ourselves would say about Jesus. His own words ring clear - "I came to the world to testify to the Truth. Everyone on the side of Truth listens to me." (John 18:37).

This leads to our second point of reflection: Do we truly listen to his voice? As Pope Benedict XVI reminds us in "Jesus of Nazareth," being a witness to the truth means giving priority to God's will over worldly interests.

Third, we must recognize, as Jesus declared to Pilate, "You have no power over me unless it were given to you from above." (John 19:11). This profound statement reminds us that all our power, possessions, and skills are gifts from above.

Pilate's journey with Jesus is particularly telling. He moves from mere knowledge and hearsay to a direct encounter with Christ. As a Roman judge, he finds no legal basis for conviction. His personal judgment and instinct confirm Christ's innocence. Yet when he attempts to exert authority, Jesus reminds him of the true source of all power. Divine intervention becomes apparent – Pilate's fear intensifies when he hears Jesus called the Son of God, and his wife's dream warns against condemning an innocent man.

The irony is striking - although Pilate knew about Jesus, experienced a personal encounter with Him, and had heard His voice, he still failed to follow Him. His journey begins with a skeptical question "Are you a King?" (John 18:37) and ends with him authoring the trilingual declaration on the cross: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" (John 19:19) – words he stubbornly defends: "What I have written, I have written." (John 19:22).

The path to becoming a person of substance lies in the practical application of Christ's teachings, particularly those found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Jesus concludes this seminal discourse with the parable of two builders - one wise, one foolish - to illustrate how authentic depth of character is developed.

Life-building parallels house building: every decision shapes our foundation. From our daily interactions and worship practices to our consumption choices and financial stewardship, each action either strengthens or weakens our spiritual infrastructure. The wise builder, representing a person of true depth, anchors their decisions in Christ's teachings - the metaphorical rock. This foundation withstands life's trials through consistent application of biblical principles like the Beatitudes and the Golden Rule.

Conversely, the foolish builder represents superficial living - hearing truth but failing to practice it. Jesus emphasizes that mere intellectual understanding without practical application creates an unstable foundation, like building on shifting sand. Substantive character

emerges not from theological knowledge alone, but from the deliberate practice of Christ's teachings in every aspect of life.

"Is God dead?" - this haunting question probes not just divine existence, but the vitality of faith in our lives. Two profound testimonies, separated by centuries, illuminate the path to encountering the living God. A Roman centurion, witnessing Christ's crucifixion, declares "Surely he was the Son of God." (Mathew 27:54) - a spontaneous recognition born from direct experience. In our era, Billy Graham's testimony resonates similarly: "I know God exists because of my personal experience... He acts in my everyday life."

Yet Alexander Schmemann, Orthodox priest and theologian, diagnoses our modern spiritual malady: we have transformed God from living experience into mere theology, from vibrant reality into abstract principles. This academic reduction strips faith of its transformative power. The apostle John emphasizes tangible encounter (1 John 1:1) - "what our eyes have seen, what our ears have heard, what our hands have touched" - as the essence of authentic witness.

This raises urgent questions: Beyond our religious routines and theological frameworks, what personal encounters shape our faith? Is God a living presence manifested in our families, communities, and churches? Or have we inadvertently entombed Him in ritual and abstraction? The answer lies not in philosophical argument but in the evidence of transformed lives and genuine encounters with the divine.

In the halls of a Düsseldorf art gallery, a profound transformation occurred when 19-year-old nobleman Nikolaus von Zinzendorf encountered Domenico Fetti's "Ecce Homo" painting. The artwork, depicting Christ's passion, carried a piercing inscription: "*All this I did for you, what has thou done for me?*" This question catalyzed an extraordinary spiritual awakening in Zinzendorf, who, despite his privileged background and challenging childhood, responded by renouncing his fortune and dedicating his life to Christ's service. This pivotal moment launched Zinzendorf into becoming one of the greatest influencers of modern-day missions.

Beholding the Man, the 'author and finisher of our faith', who endured the cross despising the shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12: 2), is essential for becoming fully human. Ecce Homo need not be confined to just Holy Week but all the days of our life especially during all Lents and Fridays; and feasts like the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. As we approach fifteen days lent (Soonoyo Lent) here are just two concluding reflections on Ecce Homo:

• **Is God alive in our lives?**

Do we truly experience the presence of God in our daily lives, or are we merely going through the motions of faith? Is our belief vibrant and transformative, or has it become a passive routine? Christ stands before us—do we recognize Him, or do we, like the crowd, turn away?

• **Whom do we identify with—St. Mary or Pilate?**

Do we mirror St. Mary, who responded to God's call with unwavering faith and surrender? Or are we more like Pilate, who recognized the truth but compromised it for worldly acceptance and comfort? When faced with difficult choices, do we stand firm in faith or waver under pressure?

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(Mr. Simon Philips is a member of Sts. Basilios-Gregorios Orthodox Church, North Plainfield, New Jersey)

APOSTOLIC LEADERSHIP

Fr. Dr. Timothy (Tenny) Thomas

FROM CALLING TO COMMISSION: THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF APOSTOLIC LEADERSHIP

Throughout history, countless leaders have risen and fallen, but the Apostles of Christ left a mark that endures across generations, cultures, and continents. These ordinary men became extraordinary vessels of God, not because of their status, but because of their surrender, character, and obedience. In a world yearning for authentic leadership, the lives of the Apostles offer profound lessons—timeless truths wrapped in divine calling. Drawing from the lived experiences of the Holy Apostles, this short article will highlight five leadership qualities that serve as powerful catalysts to inspire, shape, and equip those called to lead—whether in faith, family, community, or a broader mission.

1. Courageous Conviction: The Boldness to Stand for Truth

When Peter and John stood before the Sanhedrin, threatened and commanded not to speak in the name of Jesus, their response was unshakable: "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). This was not mere stubbornness—it was Spirit-fueled courage born of conviction.

Leadership rooted in deep conviction does not falter when pressured. In a time when moral relativism often eclipses absolute truth, the Apostles remind us that boldness is not arrogance—it is obedience to God above all.

In an age marked by shifting cultural tides, wise leadership requires the courage to identify which convictions are truly non-negotiable. Such leaders remain anchored in their principles, even when doing so invites opposition or demands personal sacrifice. Acts

4:31 – “After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.” [1]

2. Servant-hearted Humility: Leading from the Knees

In a society where leadership often means dominion, the Apostles followed the example of Christ, who washed their feet and commanded them to do likewise (Saint John 13:14-15). After the resurrection, we see Peter not as a boastful spokesman but a shepherd: (1 Peter 5:2-3) – “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care… not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”

True spiritual leadership is not about climbing higher but stooping lower. The Apostles taught that humility is the highway of divine authority. Whether one is a CEO or a church volunteer, never forget that greatness in the kingdom is measured in service, not in status. – Saint Matthew 23:11 – “The greatest among you will be your servant.” [2]

3. Resilient Faith: Enduring Trials with Joy

Paul, once a persecutor, became a tireless missionary who endured shipwrecks, beatings, imprisonments, and betrayal (2 Corinthians 11:24-28). Yet his refrain was joy: Romans 8:18 – “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

Resilient faith does not avoid hardship—it transcends it. The Apostles remind us that true leaders are not those who never fall, but those who rise again with purpose.

When trials test our calling, let them refine—not define—us. Suffering often births the deepest authority. 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 – “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed… struck down, but not destroyed.” [3]

4. Visionary Purpose: Living for a Mission Greater Than Self

From fishermen to world-changers, the Apostles caught a glimpse of God’s grand vision:

"Go and make disciples of all nations…" (Saint Matthew 28:19). They moved with intentionality, fueled by a vision that reached beyond borders and generations.

Great leaders are not driven by ego but by a calling that outlives them. The Apostles gave their lives to something eternal, refusing to settle for mediocrity or comfort. Ask ourselves—what legacy are we building? Let our leadership be anchored in the will of God, not for the applause and appreciation of the people around us. Philippians 3:14 – "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." [4]

5. Spirit-led Discernment: Following Divine Promptings

Leadership without discernment is dangerous. After Pentecost, the Apostles moved not by strategy alone but by the Spirit's guidance. When selecting leaders, confronting sin, or deciding where to preach, they prayed and waited on God. In Acts 13:2, "While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul…"

Spirit-led leadership means staying connected to the Source. It is not about intuition, but intimacy with God. Before making major decisions, pause to pray. Tune our ears to the still small voice that never misleads. Galatians 5:25 – "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." [5]

BECOMING APOSTOLIC LEADERS TODAY

The Apostles were not perfect men, but they were willing, transformed, and obedient. In them, we find a blueprint for enduring leadership: bold conviction, humble service, resilient faith, divine vision, and Spirit-filled discernment. These qualities are not reserved for the few—they are cultivated by all who surrender to Christ.

We are all, in some measure, called to lead like the Apostles did. Whether in the pulpit or the pew, in mission fields or marketplaces, the Holy Spirit continues to raise voices that speak truth with grace and act with a love that builds and binds. Apostolic leadership is not about dominance—it is about discipleship, dependence on God, and the courage to go where others will not. As we lead in our own spheres, may we echo their cry, "We must obey God rather than human beings!" (Acts 5:29), and carry forward the fire that turned the world upside down.

As we reflect on the transformative power of apostolic leadership, may we pray for such leaders to rise in our midst—and may we ourselves be willing vessels. The same Spirit that empowered the Apostles continues to move today. Let us walk boldly, serve humbly, and lead with the burning conviction that God is still working through us.

Endnotes

[1]: Acts 4:31 – This verse illustrates the Apostles' boldness as a result of prayer and the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Their courage stemmed from divine empowerment, not personal charisma.

[2]: Saint Matthew 23:11 – Jesus' direct teaching on servant leadership, later lived out by the Apostles.

[3]: 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 – Saint Paul reflects the spiritual resilience that leaders need to endure hardships and setbacks without losing hope.

[4]: Philippians 3:14 – Saint Paul's unwavering pursuit of his divine calling demonstrates visionary leadership driven by eternal purpose.

[5]: Galatians 5:25 - A foundational verse for Spirit-led leadership, showing that true leaders walk in alignment with the Holy Spirit, just as the Apostles did.

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(Rev. Fr. Dr. Timothy [Tenny] Thomas is the Vicar of St. Gregorios Orthodox Church, Raleigh, NC, USA. He is also serving as the Adjunct Assistant Professor at St. John's University, New York and Guest Lecturer at St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary, Pennsylvania)

FEAST OF THE DORMITION OF THE MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS

Fr. John Easo

The Feast of the Dormition of the most holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin, is celebrated on August 15th every year. It commemorates the death, resurrection and glorification of the body of the Theotokos, into heaven. It proclaims that Mary has been "assumed" by God into the heavenly kingdom of Christ in the fullness of her spiritual and bodily existence. This Feast marks its beginning with a Fasting period of fifteen days and ends with the Divine Liturgy celebrated on August 15th, the Feast Day. The Church calls upon every member to come and be part of this journey as it focuses on the Mother of God, who is a complete fulfilment and a perfect model of the Image of God and also emphasizes the "falling-asleep" of the Most Holy one. In the Orthodox Church this Feast Day is observed with deep reverence and faith towards the one who lived a life of witness and willingness to be, as St. Paul mentions, - "In Christ". One of these examples can be found in the Gospel according to St. Luke 1:47 – "My soul magnifies the Lord and my Spirit rejoices in God my saviour". This is the foundational theme significantly found throughout the life of the Mother of God.

THEOTOKOS, THE ARCHETYPE OF HUMANKIND

When we examine the life of St. Mary, we see that she has been the fulfilment of all the prophecies and is the perfect creation of God. In the language of the Church Fathers, she journeyed from 'Image to Likeness', attaining higher spiritual potentials through Grace. As St. Paul reminds us in the Letter to Ephesians 2:8 – "For by grace we have been saved through faith, and this is not our own doing, it is the gift of God". It is a gift given to us freely and not based on our work or merit, it is given to us for our growth and spiritual building. The Sacramental life of the Church and the Liturgy are the streams through which we receive the grace and mercy of God. Through the Church, we are made heirs to the Eternal life and Promise, as Church is the extension of Christ,

so the mysteries are the power by which the Church saves us. At an early age, when the Mother of God was presented at the temple by her parents, Saints Joachim and Anna, she lived in God's grace and experienced the Holy Mysteries that transformed her to be the Chosen vessel of God. As Christians of the 20th Century, we are reminded of – Love, Obedience and Commitment that bring us closer to God and his life-giving mysteries. When we look back to the story of Creation, Adam and Eve were given all that was needed for their journey towards growing in the likeness of God, as we also received through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. It is human discernment and the usage of freewill, that leads us either to Light or Darkness. Theotokos, experiences "Freedom" in her complete submission to God, reminding us that Freedom is something we experience fully while being in God. We see a perfect cooperation of her human will with the Divine. St. Mary through her freewill and obedience

becomes the Crown of the Creation and unites the earthly and heavenly, bringing forth perfect union. She reverses the act of disobedience, unfaithfulness and the choice of evil over good, and reminds us of greater possibilities of being holy and God like.

A hymn of the Ninth hour, from the Services of the Holy and Great Friday is as follows, "The tree cried out saying, "Woe is me! What has happened! On me, they crucified the Lord of all. He nurtured me with dew and rains; in return I gave him only death. Woe to you wicked one, who hanged him upon me!". In another hymn it says, "the sun hid its rays, the heaven and earth were shaken, when they saw their Lord naked". These hymns remind us of the fall of Adam and his descendants and how the whole creation is being affected by the choice of having evil over good. On the other side, the Mother of God approaching her days of departure, prayed unceasingly at the Mount of Olives. Tradition records that even the trees bowed down with her in prayer and reverence. This act reveals the Glory of God in and through the Life of St. Mary. We as a Church are reminded and called, not just to read about God and to know him, but also project him through our daily life to people around us. The Mother of God encourages us to grow and to be a perfect creation of God.

REFLECTION ON THE DORMITION OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

The Feast of Dormition reveals the great mystery and stands as a reminder to us all that when we, through God's grace, live a life of holiness, obedience and more than all, keep the word of God in our hearts and do his will, as the Lord himself attests in St. John 8:51, "never see death". Orthodoxy is exploring and living through the narrow gates of Christian life, through which we are formed, moulded and made a worthy vessel for God to reside in us. In this case, death will not be a death

but a translation to a new and eternal life. A famous Greek inscription on the doors of St. Paul's Monastery on Mt. Athos, is as follows, "If you die before you die, you won't die when you die", reminds us of putting to death our human desires of pleasure and gratification and aligning it with Divine will. Eventually, when we die, it would be a blessed transition from this temporary world to that of Eternity.

This deal is made possible through Christ's Incarnation, Death and Resurrection from the dead. The Master of the Cross conquers not only death and sin, but also redefines life after death. This is universally bestowed upon the world as a remedy to attain salvation. The Mother of God, embraces this gift and lived her life befitting to God. Indeed, having lived her entire life in the presence of God, and being united heart and soul with her Son and Savior, her "death" was shown to be a final passageway, a culminating moment for that which she truly longed forever. St. John of Damascus confirms the Paschal nature of the Feast of the Dormition by calling the death of the Theotokos, "The Deathless Death". He calls it the deathless death because of the fact that death resulted in her translation into life eternal, into glorification and union with the Lord. He says, "O how does the source of life pass through death to life? She dies according to the flesh, destroys death by death, and through corruption gains incorruption, and makes her death the source of resurrection." As St. Paul writes in his 1st Letter to Corinthians 15:55, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?", here death itself becomes triumphant life and a way of union with God.

To conclude, the Mother of God can be seen as a shadow of the Ark of the Old Testament, which was sent before the Israelites as they were traveling from the desert to the promised land. Through the dormition, she goes before us into the promised land of Heaven as our forerunner and as an intercessor to help us unite with God. The Feast Day of the Dormition is a most compelling reminder of the hope with which we too are called to live in this transient and fleeting life. In the same way that death was experienced as life in the case of the Virgin Mother, so also can this become our experience as well, in our "final" moments here on earth. That is to say, in having the Mother of God as our pre-eminent example in this life to the extent that she truly embodies what it means to live a Christ-loving and Christ-centered life, we too are able to live with the future hope of our Lord's gift and promise of unending life to us, to the extent, of course, that we truly desire and seek to live by His love in all that we do in this life.

Through her "death," the Virgin Mother provides the much-needed confidence and conviction that death can in fact become an act of truly living for all. Thus, the Feast has no sadness, no grief, but only light and joy. Neither death nor the tomb could hold the Mother of God. She victoriously walks over death. This becomes for us, a passageway into life and into our Lord's eternal kingdom, where His loving presence and embrace will forever reign; and where His unfading and resplendent light will eternally shine.

Let us joyfully come forth to venerate the Most Holy Mother of God, to imitate her and to manifest God in our lives through her intercession. May we, like the Good Thief, steal paradise, unworthy though we may be, so that together we might glorify the Almighty God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, to Whom belongs worship and glory forever. Amen!

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(Rev. Fr. John Easo is a priest of the Bombay Diocese)

EXPLORING THE HOLY WORD

Varghese Daniel

THE UNVEILING TRUTH: (LUKE 12:2-3)

Jesus' words in Luke 12:2-3, "For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Therefore, whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops," offer a profound theological truth with startling contemporary relevance. These verses, uttered millennia ago, speak directly to the spiritual and social realities of our present day, particularly in the age of pervasive digital technology and instant communication.

At its core, this passage is a powerful affirmation of God's omniscience and His ultimate justice. The theological implication is that God sees and knows all. Nothing escapes His gaze; no secret is truly concealed from Him. This truth is foundational to a just moral order, for without a divine-being who holds all knowledge, true accountability is impossible.

Jesus is not merely issuing a pragmatic warning about human discovery. He is articulating a divine principle. The "light" and "housetops" represent the ultimate divine court where all truths will be laid bare. This serves as both a comfort for the oppressed, reassuring them that their secret suffering is not unseen, and a terror for the oppressor, warning that their deeds will not remain hidden indefinitely.

This theological truth demands an ethical response. If all will ultimately be revealed, then

the only logical and righteous path is one of integrity and authenticity. Hypocrisy, the very subject of Jesus' immediately preceding warning, becomes an ultimately futile endeavor. Living a double life—maintaining a public facade while engaging in private wrongdoing—is exposed as a profound spiritual delusion.

While Jesus' words speak to an eternal divine truth, their echo in the present day, especially in the context of our digital landscape, is remarkably prescient. In Jesus' time, a housetop was a public, elevated place from which news or announcements could be broadcast to a community. Today, the internet, particularly social media platforms, functions as the ultimate "housetop." What was once whispered "in inner rooms"—private conversations, controversial opinions, or personal actions—can now be recorded, shared, and "proclaimed on the housetops" to a global audience in an instant. The digital age has blurred the lines between public and private domains. This reality gives new weight to Jesus' warning; the "revealing" is not just an eschatological event but a continuous, often immediate, social phenomenon.

It is crucial to remember that Jesus' primary point transcends human technological capabilities. Even if something remains humanly undiscovered, it is never hidden from God. The ultimate "light" is His truth, and the ultimate "housetop" is His judgment. This theological depth calls believers to an inner integrity that goes beyond the fear of human exposure. It fosters a life lived in conscious awareness of God's omnipresence, where ethical choices are driven not just by potential earthly consequences, but by a profound desire to honor the God who sees all.

Jesus' words in Luke 12:2-3 are a timeless warning and a profound theological statement. They affirm God's absolute knowledge and the certainty of future revelation. In our present digital age, these words take on an unnervingly literal resonance, as technology rapidly accelerates the process of bringing hidden things to light. This contemporary echo serves as a powerful reminder for all—believers and non-believers alike—of the increasing transparency of human existence. For the Christian, it is a call to radical authenticity, to live a life of integrity that is consistent in both public and private spheres, knowing that ultimately, all will be laid bare before the God who knows all. It is an invitation to embrace the light, rather than fear its inevitable unveiling.

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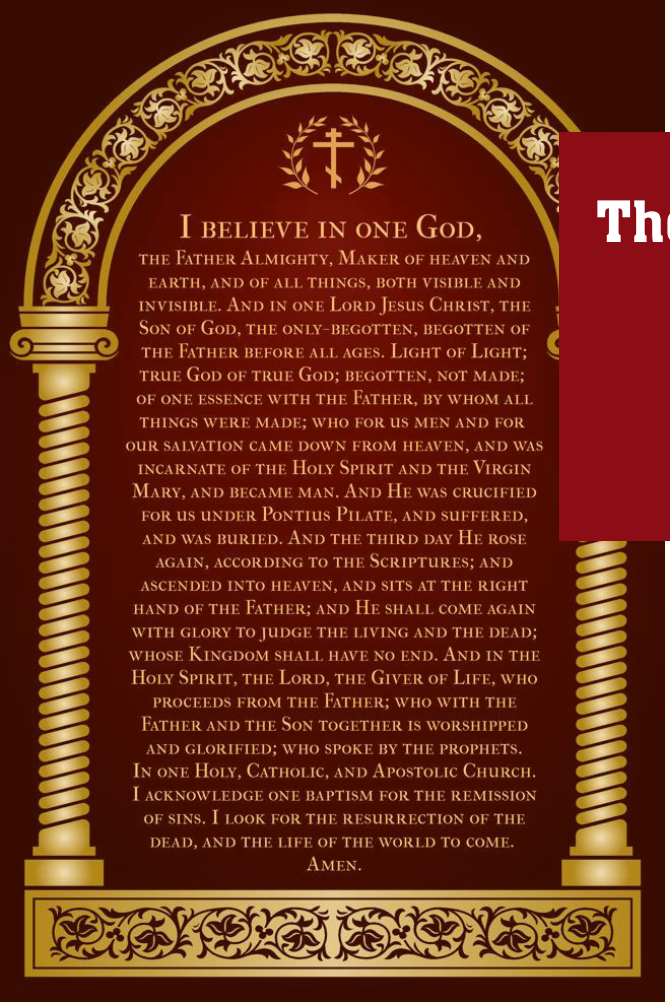
(Shri. Varghese Daniel is a retired Regional PF Commissioner from the Central Government's EPFO who, as a layman, is deeply interested in theological studies, particularly the works of Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios. He has authored two books, 'Vishwamanavan Prapanchathile Daivasannidhyam' (Malayalam) and 'Divinization: Experiencing God in the Orthodox Faith'.)


I believe in one God,
the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things, both visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of Light; true God of true God; begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man. And He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried. And the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead; whose Kingdom shall have no end. And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets. In one Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The 1700th Anniversary of the Nicene Creed

Fr. P.A. Philip

The year 2025 marks the 1700th Anniversary of one of the important milestones in the history of Christianity, the formulation of the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed, also called the Nicene - Constantinopolitan Creed, is a statement of the Orthodox faith of the early Christian Church in opposition to certain heresies, especially Arianism. The Creed we recite today is a combined product of the Ecumenical Councils held at Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381). The major part of the Creed was formulated in the Council of Nicaea.

The Nicene Creed is a foundational statement of Christian faith, accepted and upheld by all major Christian denominations including Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and major Protestant churches (interestingly, recently some of the Pentecostal churches also started reciting the creed). The creed serves as a formal declaration of belief, outlining the key doctrines like the Holy Trinity and the Divinity of Christ. Its significance lies in its ability to unite Christians across different traditions in a common understanding of core tenets.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA AND ITS PROCLAMATION OF FAITH `

Firstly, the Nicene Creed represents a significant milestone in church history, marking a crucial moment in the development of Christian doctrine. It reflects the early church's efforts to articulate and protect core beliefs against theological challenges.

Secondly, the Nicene Creed helps define what Christians believe about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. It provides a framework for understanding the Christian faith and distinguishes it from other belief systems.

Thirdly, the Creed emerged in response to theological debates, particularly Arianism, which challenged the Divinity of Christ. By affirming the co-equality and co - eternity of the Father and the Son, the Nicene Creed helps maintain doctrinal purity.

Fourthly, the Nicene Creed fosters a sense of unity among Christians by providing a shared language for expressing faith. It connects

Christians across different denominations and throughout history.

Fifthly, the Nicene Creed is commonly recited during worship services, particularly during Baptism and the Holy Qurbana. Its recitation reinforces the shared faith and helps to create a sense of community. In our Orthodox worship, the Nicene creed is an inseparable part of our Holy Qurbana, Sacraments and other Holy Services. It is both a prayer and a proclamation of faith.

The Council of Nicaea, produced several canons that addressed various aspects of church governance, doctrine, and discipline. Of the 20 canons established, the most significant are the affirmation of the Divinity of Christ and the establishment of a uniform date for Easter in the Christian world.

REASONS FOR THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA

After Emperor Constantine declared Christianity as the official religion of the Roman empire, through the famous Edict of Milan (313), Christianity got imperial patronage and was granted many privileges. A persecuted community became the privileged community. During this relatively peaceful period, heresies began to raise their ugly head.

Arius, a 4th-century Alexandrian priest under Patriarch Alexander held controversial theological views that led to significant debates in the early Christian Church. His main contentions can be summarized as follows:

NATURE OF JESUS CHRIST:

- Arius taught that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was a created being, distinct and subordinate to God the Father.
- He emphasized the uniqueness and supremacy of God the Father, arguing that the Son's Divinity was not equal to the Father.' Arius' views were rooted in subordinationism, which posits that the Son and the Holy Spirit are subordinate to God the Father. This perspective challenged the Orthodox understanding of the Trinity, which affirms the coequal nature of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Arians talked as if Christ were not God the Creator but merely one of the things God had made—which meant that he was created out of nothing and that there was a "once when he did not exist."
- Arius based his teachings on specific scriptural passages, such as Proverbs 8:22-25, which describes Wisdom (often interpreted as Christ) as being created by God.
- He argued that these passages supported his view of the Son's subordinate nature.

OPPOSITION AND CONTROVERSY:

- Arius' teachings sparked intense controversy and opposition from other theologians, including Alexander of Alexandria and his young secretary Athanasius of Alexandria. The controversy ultimately led to the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, where Arius' views were rejected, and the Nicene Creed was formulated to affirm the divinity and coequality of Jesus Christ with God the Father.
- Arius' teachings had a significant impact on the development of Christian theology, and the debates surrounding his views continue to influence Christian doctrine and understanding of the nature of God.

WHAT DOES THE NICENE CREED TEACH?

The creed has four paragraphs which answer five important philosophical and theological questions.

1. Who is God?
2. Who is Jesus Christ?
3. Who is the Holy Spirit?
4. What is the Church?

5. Life after death?

1. Who is God?

Our God is ONE and He is our heavenly and loving Father; (This implies God's Authority and Affection); Creator of all things visible and invisible; God is Almighty.

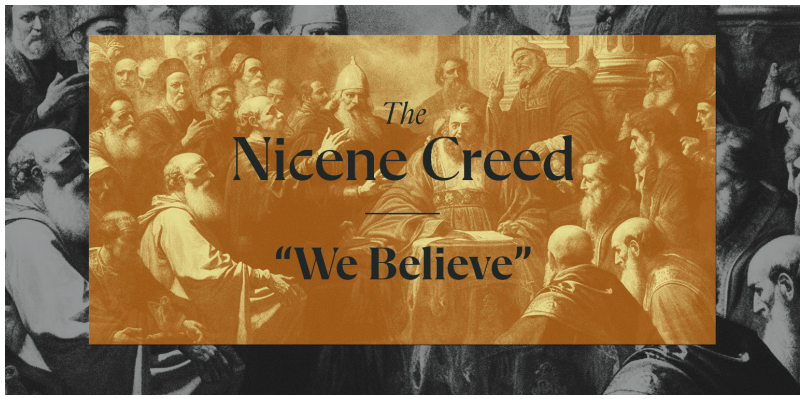
2. Who is Jesus Christ?

Jesus is the only-begotten Son of God

- At the core of the creed is the teaching that Jesus Christ is the only-begotten Son of God (in the first half of the second article). He is begotten from God the Father in eternity, before all the ages of time, as true God from true God.
- "Begotten" is simply an old word for how a son originates from a father. For example, in the language of the King James Bible, Isaac was "begotten" by Abraham, and Jacob was "begotten" by Isaac.
- Unlike a human father and son, who are two human beings, God the Father and God the Son are only one God. What is more: God the Father is eternally Father, so he has never been without his Son. The creed therefore does not allow us to say, with the Arians, "There was a then (time) when he did not exist." The Son is equally eternal with the Father, and therefore equally God. It aims to make absolutely clear that the Son of God is just as truly God as God the Father, equal to him in divinity, equal in eternity, equally omnipotent, and equally the creator of all things. (The first half of second paragraph speaks about the Son of God before his incarnation). In other words, the same person who was born of the Virgin Mary and crucified by Pontius Pilate has always existed as the eternal Son of God. This is why he rightly sits on the throne of God and we worship him.

<u>Jesus is fully human and fully God</u>

- In addition to the Trinity, the creed confesses faith in the incarnation (in the second half of the second article). This is what happened when the eternal Son of God descended from heaven to become a human being, taking on flesh in the womb of his mother, Mary. (Kenosis = self-emptying). The ancient theologians of the church, following the creed, spoke of two births of Jesus Christ. He is begotten from the Father before all ages, (born of the Father without a mother) but he was also born of the Virgin Mary a little more than two thousand years ago (born of a mother without a father). Because of his eternal birth from the Father, he is truly God, and because of his birth two thousand years ago from Mary he is truly man. He is God taking up our humanity and making it his own. Because he is born in human flesh, he can also die in the flesh just like us: and so, the creed confesses that he was crucified in the days of Pontius Pilate and buried.
- Jesus's rising again on the third day is therefore a resurrection of the flesh, as the Apostles' Creed puts it. It is not just the life of his soul after death: it is the defeat of death itself by the power of God. For Jesus who was dead is now again a living man, body and soul, and it is this man who now sits at the right hand of the Father, on the throne of God. When we pray for the kingdom of God to come on earth as it is in heaven, we are looking for the coming of this man in glory, awaiting his kingdom that shall have no end. And we are awaiting our own resurrection in him, when he bestows on us the everlasting life of the age to come (last paragraph of the creed). All this good news about Christ our Lord is packed into the creed, and it is therefore confessed and proclaimed by millions of Christians every Sunday.



3.Who is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father.

- The creed underlines that the Holy Spirit is a Person who is worshipped and praised equal with the Father and the Son, and one who can speak and enlighten and enliven others.
- Add to this that the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father (in the third paragraph). Just as God the Father is never without his Son, so he is never without his Spirit. So, the Spirit, too, is equally eternal and equally the one true God. We uphold that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and accepts from the Son. (The Western Church later added that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son too).

This gives us the basic logic of the doctrine of the Trinity.

4. What is the Church?

The creed describes the Church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

The Church is one, united in faith and under one Lord, Jesus Christ. It is holy, set apart for God's purposes, and its members are called to a life of holiness. "Catholic" denotes the universal church, referring to the Church's worldwide scope and its inclusive nature, encompassing believers across all times and places. The Church is apostolic, meaning it is rooted in the teachings and practices of the apostles.

The Creed emphasizes that the Church is a community of believers united by their shared faith in God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

5. Life after death

The Creed expresses the belief in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. It describes life after death as "eternal life," emphasizing a continuation of existence with God, free from death and pain. It also anticipates the resurrection of the dead and Christ's second coming, when believers will be reunited with God in a perfected state.

ONGOING RELEVANCE OF NICENE CREED

Even though it was formulated in the 4th century, the Nicene Creed continues to be relevant today because it addresses the fundamental truths about God that are still debated and contested. By reciting and reflecting on the creed, Christians can deepen their understanding of their faith and remain faithful to the core tenets of Christianity.

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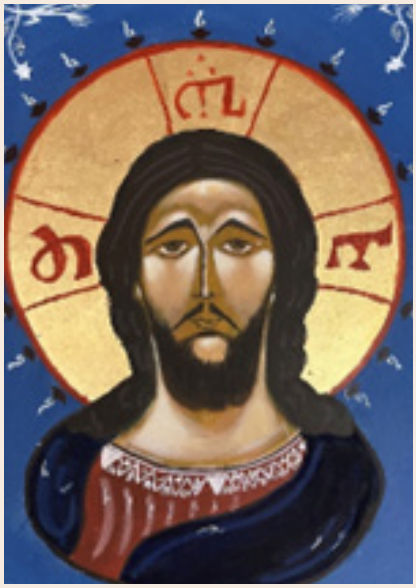
(Rev. Fr. P. A. Philip is the Director of the Ministry of Human Empowerment of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.)



AN ICON OF COMPASSION

Daniel Binu Varghese

God's Compassion and Love is infinite and is expressed and experienced in different ways by each one of us. The Icon of Compassion is one such experience, expressing the everlasting compassion of God.

Here is an attempt to reflect on the Icon of Compassion with 5 elements that are seen in the icon.

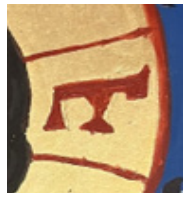
The first reflection focuses on the sign of the Holy Trinity in the Halo of Christ. The letter ܝ̣ at the centre of the Halo represents The CREATOR in all His glory, above all, in all glow. The Estrangela letter ܝ̣, which is the oldest form of the Syriac alphabet, is a combination of two letters: ܝ (yodh) and ܗ (heh). These two letters are equivalent to the Hebrew Tetragrammaton יהוה (YHVH), the four-letter Hebrew name of God. The three points above signify the three persons of the Trinity, and one point below signifies oneness forming ܝ̣. This was an ancient symbol used in old Syriac texts as well as in sacred artforms like icons denoting the Divine name. The Symbol ܝ̣ is the scribal

abbreviation of the Name of God as revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 3:14).

The second reflection focuses on

the neckline or the top portion of the dress. Miniature expressions of Creation from Day Zero to Day Seven are represented in a style resembling Warli art. The basis of this depiction is Genesis Chapter 1: The CREATIONS of the CREATOR, created by His love and warmth. We, 'the created' are varied and remain a mystery

to ourselves, which is to be enlightened in the divine presence. It is our responsibility to pray with and for all creation, as was entrusted to Adam in Paradise.



The third and fourth reflections are of the symbols on both sides of the halo. The first letter ܐ and last letter ܬ in Estrangela (on either side of the halo) means, He is the beginning and end, the Alpha and Omega. The expression, "He is the end" (Omega), reminds us to pray for all that was in the past… or in other words, all that was from the beginning till this moment. To thank our Lord and pray for all the departed. To seek forgiveness by His mercy, for all the wrongs of the past.

A reflection on the fourth expression, "He is the beginning" (Alpha), exhorts us to pray for all that is from now, a beginning. To have His Grace on all that would be from now, till time eternity. To seek mercy and pray for all generations to come.

The fifth and final element, shared as a reflection, is the forehead of our Lord. In Iconography, there is a final brush stroke by the master, referred to as the "opening of the eye". The master has the final touch starting from this forehead. Each Icon being written, is a prayer, and this touch by the master, is like blessing the prayer. As a reflection, it is a converging point of all the above 4 elements …

starting with the Creator, His Creations, From the beginning, and to the end, … this is a journey of Theosis, the process of being one with God and like Him.

The objective of this life, as explained by Theosis (Deification) is to be in this journey and become a perfect reflection of God, as we are created in His image. We are offered the Compassion of God …to repent, …to forgive and …to receive His Grace. This puts us back on track for our journey to be once again in this Image of God. Each Icon does become a reflection of You, for You were created in His image. The Icon of Compassion is one such reflection.

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(Mr. Daniel Binu Varghese is the Co-ordinator of Theo Institute of Eastern Studies, Mumbai. He is also the Senior Friend for Bombay MGOCSM and a volunteer with Roha, Gregorian Community.)

Responsible Positive Parenting

Amal Thomas

PARENTING IS NOT A POPULARITY CONTEST

Once a judge, while questioning a person accused of robbery, asked if he had anything to say. The man replied, "Yes, Your Honor. Please sentence my parents also to jail". The judge asked, "Why?" The accused answered, "When I was a little boy, I stole a pencil from school. My parents knew about it but never said a word. Then I stole a pen. They deliberately ignored it. I continued to steal many other things from school and the neighborhood till it became an obsession. Though my parents knew every time I did it, they never said a word. If anyone belongs in jail with me, they do."

What did you understand from the above story? Do you think he is right? Yes, he is right. Although it does not absolve him of his responsibility, the question is 'did the parents do their job properly?' Obviously not.

In a child's life, parents have a major role in the formation of behavior and personality. As everyone knows, family is the smallest unit of society. Children model their basic behavior from their parents. Parents are their role models.

CHILDREN LEARN WHAT THEY LIVE

If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn.

If a child lives with praise, he learns to appreciate.

If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight.

If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient.

If a child lives with ridicule, he learns to be shy.

If a child lives with encouragement, he learns confidence.

If a child lives with shame, he learns to feel guilty.

If a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself.

If a child lives with fairness, he learns justice.

If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith.

If a child lives with acceptance and friendship, he learns to find love in the world.

WHAT CHILDREN GET, THEY GIVE TO SOCIETY.

So, I would say that parenthood is the greatest and the most responsible duty in the world.

WHAT IS PARENTING?

In psychology, parenting is defined as the process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development of a child, from infancy to adulthood. It involves the intricate activities of care, socialization, and education by parents, focusing on a child's healthy development and well-being. This definition emphasizes the active role parents play in shaping a child's growth and development.

In another definition, parenting means raising a child or children from childhood to adulthood, in an environment of nurturance, support, encouragement, direction, guidance and love. Therefore, the equation for a healthy parenting is a balance between nurturance and structure.

Nurturance refers to a parent's sensitivity, responsiveness, and emotional support for their child, fostering healthy development and attachment. It involves responding to a child's needs, offering emotional support, and engaging in practices that promote individuality and self-regulation. Nurturance is a crucial element of parenting styles, impacting a child's physical, emotional, and social well-being.

In parenting, Structure refers to the routines, rules, and predictable environments that provide children with a sense of security and stability. This structure helps children feel safe, secure, and confident, while also allowing parents to feel more competent in their roles.

DIFFERENT STYLES OF PARENTING

Parenting styles refer to the different 'approaches' parents take in raising their children. The four primary styles are authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and neglectful. These styles are based on factors like parental demands and responsiveness to children. While parents often blend characteristics from different styles, understanding these approaches can help parents reflect on their own parenting behaviors and their impact on children.

Here is a more detailed look at each parenting style:

Authoritarian Parenting

Authoritarian parents typically engage in a one-way mode of communication where they establish strict rules that the child is expected to follow without questioning or negotiating. These rules are rarely explained, and children are expected to attain high standards without making mistakes. Errors are often met with punishment. Authoritarian parents tend to be less nurturing, maintaining high expectations with limited flexibility.

Children raised by authoritarian parents often exhibit good behavior due to the consequences of misbehavior. Additionally, they tend to follow precise instructions more effectively to achieve their goals. However, this parenting style can also lead to higher

levels of aggression, while children may also exhibit shyness, social ineptitude, and difficulty making their own decisions. This uncontrolled aggression may stem from challenges in managing anger, as these children often lack proper guidance. Additionally, they may struggle with low self-esteem, which further hinders their decision-making abilities. Strict parental rules and punishments can also drive children to rebel against 'authority figures' as they grow older.

Authoritative Parenting

Authoritative parenting is characterized by a close, nurturing relationship between parents and children. Parents set clear expectations and guidelines and explain the reasoning behind their disciplinary actions. They use disciplinary methods as a supportive tool rather than as punishment. Children are encouraged to contribute in setting goals and expectations, thereby fostering open, frequent, and appropriate communication between parent and child. This parenting style generally results in the healthiest outcomes for children, but requires considerable patience and effort from both parties.

Authoritative parenting fosters confidence, responsibility, and self-regulation in children. These children manage negative emotions more effectively, leading to improved social outcomes and emotional well-being. By encouraging independence, authoritative parents help their children understand that they can achieve goals on their own, resulting in higher self-esteem. Additionally, these children tend to excel academically and perform well in school.

Permissive Parenting

Permissive parents are typically warm and nurturing, often holding minimal expectations for their children. They impose few rules and maintain open communication, allowing their children to navigate situations independently. This lack of expectation usually leads to infrequent disciplinary actions, as permissive parents often take on a more friend-like role than that of traditional authority figures.

Limited rules can lead children to develop unhealthy eating habits, particularly regarding snacks, increasing their risk of obesity and other health issues later in life. These children enjoy considerable freedom, making decisions about their bedtime, homework, and screen time on computers and televisions. Such extensive freedom can foster negative habits, as parents often provide little guidance on moderation. Overall, while children of permissive parents typically possess good self-esteem and decent social skills, at the same time, they may also be impulsive, demanding, selfish, and struggle with self-regulation.

Uninvolved Parenting

Uninvolved parenting grants children a high degree of freedom, as these parents typically adopt a hands-off approach. While they may fulfill their child's basic needs, they remain emotionally detached and disengaged from their child's life. Uninvolved parents do not adhere to a specific disciplinary style and maintain limited communication with their children, providing minimal nurturing and having few expectations.

Children of uninvolved parents often demonstrate resilience and may be more self-sufficient than those raised in other parenting styles. However, these skills are typically developed out of necessity. Additionally, they may struggle with emotional regulation, exhibit less effective coping strategies, face academic challenges, and have difficulty maintaining or nurturing social relationships.

HOW CHILDREN LEARN BEHAVIOR?

Children learn their behavior through practice and experience. Behavior formation is

a developmental process. Behavior is learned through three stages of their life. This can be divided based on their ability to reason. From birth to two years of their age they primarily learn through observing the environment and copying their role-models. From the age of two years onwards, they can understand that they can influence the world through their actions. So, from this period onwards they learn behavior from the response of others due to their behavior. According to the Stimulus-Response (S-R) theory, behavioral learning occurs through the formation of connections between stimulus and response. This will be up to the age of 10 years. 'Neuropsychologists' point out that up to 10 years of age, children are able to think on a concrete level. During teenage, they start thinking at more abstract or logical levels. This interpretation was based on the 'Moral Developmental Theory' of Lawrence Kohlberg (1984).

Kohlberg's theory of moral development proposes that individuals progress through six stages of moral reasoning, organized into three levels: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. These stages describe how people think about right and wrong as they mature, moving from a focus on personal consequences to a more principled approach based on universal ethical guidelines.

The Pre-Conventional Level:

At the first level of moral development, children judge morality largely in terms of consequences: Actions that lead to rewards are perceived as good or acceptable; ones that lead to punishments are seen as bad or unacceptable.

The Conventional Level:

As children's cognitive abilities increase, they enter a second level of moral development. Now they are aware of some of the complexities of the social order and judge morality in terms of what supports and preserves the laws and rules of their society.

The Post Conventional Level:

At this stage, people judge morality in terms of abstract principles and values rather than in terms of existing laws or rules of society. Persons who attain this stage often believe that certain obligations and values transcend the laws of society. The rules they follow are abstract and ethical, not concrete like the ten commandments, and are based on inner conscience rather than on external sources of authority.

SETTING AND IMPLEMENTING RULES AT HOME

Positive parenting is a warm, supportive and encouraging environment while being firm, consistent and clear with limits and boundaries. In this approach, parents exhibit high nurturance, high expectations and high respect to their children.

Setting a warm, structured and stable environment in the family is very important for the development in the child's life. Both parents have a prominent role in their development. Parents are a child's first role-models. They have a tendency to imitate their parents. So, parents must be careful enough in their talks and actions. Children are keen observers, so they can identify even the minute behaviors of their parents. While implementing rules, both parents should have a clear understanding about their opinion and show unanimity in explaining the rules. Setting the limits and boundaries in children can be done from their childhood itself, because at this age, children have a very good bonding with parents making it easy to communicate with them.

Family Rule:

Parents should have a clear understanding about the child's behavior, habits and attitudes. Family rules include the child's

daily routine, dietary habits, study habits, sleep hygiene, behavior within the family and outside the family, respecting elders etc. The rules are clearly explained by the parents. The rules can be of two kinds: Firm rules and Flexible rules. Firm rules are unchanging rules that cannot be modified in any condition. Firm rules must cover three areas. First is health related matters, i.e., what the child must eat, when to eat, what to drink, personal hygiene, dressing etc. second is safety matters, i.e., at what time the child should reach home, with whom the child should play, where to play, what matters they should discuss with friends, where to go with friends etc. The third is values in the family. Each family has its own family values and concepts, for e.g., religious values, helping others, sharing things etc. Firm rules are discussed in family gatherings and the importance of following these rules is explained. The consequences and actions for violating the rules are also mentioned by the parents.

Flexible rules can be modified and removed, based on the situations. This can be done through discussions with the child. For example, extending the T.V time during vacation time, modifying the daily schedule, changing the recreational timings etc.

Rules as Conditions:

In authoritative parenting, rules are not enforced, but are conditional in nature. The child can avail the privileges only when he follows the rules. The conditions remind the child that no privileges can be availed without performing his responsibilities. This indicates to the child that following the rules, is his/her responsibility. This will develop independence, confidence and shouldering of responsibilities, in children in future. There are five points to remember before keeping rules as conditions:

The Conditions must be Specific:

The nature of children is that they do the things that they are instructed to do. If the instructions are not clearly mentioned the child will do only what we instructed. So always give instructions step by step to the child.

The Conditions must be Firm:

Children manipulate instructions in multiple ways. Initially they bargain about the conditions set for them. If the parent is responding to that behavior, the child tries to manipulate the parent by keeping conditions. If the child realizes that the parent is not flexible then the child will try the second way to manipulate the rule. This time the child will manipulate the situation through threatening (showing temper tantrums) or by disturbing the parent. The child expects the parent to accept his/her demand. The parent must realize that the child is showing this manipulative behavior due to the parent's response to their actions. If the parent is still showing sympathy, the child will continue the manipulative behavior till the child gets the things done. Always realize that NO MEANS NO. Once you change 'no to yes', the child will gain confidence and repeat the behavior in another situation.

The Conditions must be Realistic:

The conditions must be set always from the child's perspective. If the child is not confident enough to accomplish the condition, they will not be ready to accept it. They will simply deny it and will not accept any of the demands of the parents. So always keep realistic conditions with the child.

The Reinforcements must be Child's Choices:

Reinforcement refers to the consequences that increase the likelihood of the child's future behavior, typically in the presence of a particular antecedent stimulus. Selecting a reinforcement for the child is always from the child's choice list. The kind of reinforcement that can be given in a particular situation, is based on the child's need. As part of this, all the

privileges that are being enjoyed by the child are controlled and regulated by the parents. Then this privilege can be provided as a reward for following the rules. These reinforcements can be materialistic or emotional ones.

Taking Consistent Action:

Once a rule is set, the parents must have in their mind what they have communicated with the child. If the parents are not consistent in their actions, the child will gradually realize that the parents will forget what they have communicated. Ultimately, the child learns to manipulate the situations. So always keep in mind that "I'm very particular on my instructions".

Neglect as Punishment:

In some situations, the child may not be ready to accept any kind of conditions, because the child's demands may be different. In this scenario, we need to observe the child and try to understand the child's need. Children are usually attention seekers. They feel insecure and disturbed when they do not get adequate attention. In such situations, they try to grab attention from the parents by showing unwanted behaviors. Naturally parents will have a tendency to respond by warning or punishing the child. The child understands that as the parents do not like that particular kind of behavior, they will pay attention whenever he/she shows negative behavior.

In this scenario, giving attention to the child is an encouragement for repeating that particular negative behavior. So, removing attention is the punishment for managing this kind of behavior. 'Neglect method' can also be called as an emotional punishment. Usually, emotional punishment is used when all conditions fail. If the child is not responding to the conditions, you need to repeat the condition once more. If the child continues that behavior, stop responding to the child and engage in other activities and interact normally with other members in the family. Gradually the child will realize that he is being ignored by the parent. Thus, the child approaches the parent and tries to compromise by showing some naughty behavior. The parent must be aware about the child's intention and respond passively with the child. This will irritate the child resulting in showing tantrums and cranky behavior. At that time the parent should clearly explain about what he/she expects from the child. This time the child starts compromising with the parent by saying "sorry". The parent repeats the expected behavior and neglects the manipulative behaviors. Thus, the child runs away from the situation. But after some time, the child starts doing the activity which was instructed previously. After the child completes the expected behavior, the parent approaches the child and hugs or appreciates the child for his effort. The child realizes that no kind of manipulations can be applied to his parent. After few weeks of this kind of approach the child will realize that obeying is more beneficial than defying it.

The techniques which were discussed are based on the behavioral principles of psychology. According to the behavior principle, behavior is learned not innate. So, if you want to modify a particular behavior you need to understand the A-B-C (Antecedent-Behavior-Consequences) connection. Most of the child's behavior can be modified through this way. If you are not able to manage the problematic behaviors even after implementing the above techniques properly, it is better to consult a Licensed Clinical Psychologist for a detailed analysis and interpretation of such behavior.

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(Shri. Amal Thomas is a Clinical Psychologist and Director of the Centre for Behavior and Cognitive Learning (CEBECLE), based in Kottayam, Kerala.)

Science and Religion: The Origin of the Universe, Life, and Humanity Part 2

Dr. Susan Eapen

This is the second part of Dr. Susan Eapen's article on Science and Religion: The Origin of the Universe, Life, and Humanity. The first part of the article published in the previous issue (April–June 2025), explored the perspectives of major Religions like Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism, on Creation; and the Origin of the Universe and Life according to Science. Part 2 deals with Tensions between Science and Religion, while trying to comprehend the nature and origin of the universe.

TENSIONS BETWEEN SCIENCE AND RELIGION

As insights from science evolve, they often intersect—or conflict—with traditional religious narratives. In Christianity, for instance, some interpretations of the 'Genesis creation account' appear incompatible with scientific findings about the age of the Earth and the evolutionary history of life. However, many contemporary theologians advocate for the integration of scientific understanding with faith, suggesting that scriptural "days" of creation could be non-literal and extensive periods aligning with geological epochs.

Similarly, in Islam and Judaism, interpretations vary on reconciling ancient texts with modern scientific discoveries. Some believers emphasize metaphorical readings of scripture, allowing room for scientific theories regarding the universe's origin.

Understanding the nature and origin of the universe, remains, one of humanity's most enduring and profound quests. It does so by juxtaposing scientific inquiry with metaphysical wonder. At its core exists the tension between these two approaches.

THE SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY

Scientists like Stephen Hawking rigorously pursued models where the Universe unfolds from self-contained physical laws. Their

approach is reductionist—a Universe whose behavior emerges naturally from the interplay of matter, energy, space, and time. In these views, a personal deity isn't necessary, and every cosmic event can, in principle, be explained by the impersonal workings of nature.

THE METAPHYSICAL WONDER

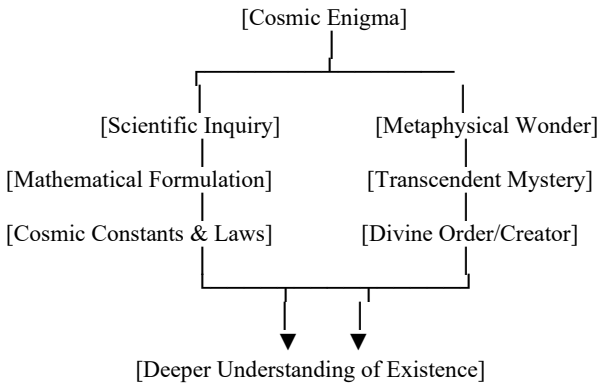
On the other hand, scientists such as Einstein, Max Planck, and Paul Dirac—each in their own way—hint at a deeper order. Einstein's idea of a law-giver reflects a reverence for mystery, a force that established the rules, yet transcends them. This notion transcends what we can approach with our concepts of time and space, suggesting that if God is truly the creator, then God must lie beyond the clockwork of the cosmos. Meanwhile, the precision observed in cosmic constants, as noted by Dirac, invites us to wonder whether mathematics itself might encode hints of an underlying intelligence. Dr. Willie Soon's intriguing claim in recent times that mathematics could ultimately prove God's existence pushes this idea even further, bridging the gap between abstract arithmetic precision and the divine.

Scientist/ Proponent	Core Notion
Albert Einstein	A cosmic law-giver whose mystery and vastness defy simple human categorization.
Stephen Hawking	A naturalistic view: the Universe operates through immutable physical laws without personal deity.
Max Planck	Science has limits, as it is part of the mystery it seeks to unravel.
Paul Dirac	The exact alignment of cosmic constants may hint at a hidden order or divine design.
Dr. Willie Soon	A mathematical formulation might reveal patterns so precise that they suggest intentional creation.

The idea that God exists "outside of time" —a creator who is eternal and immutable—invokes a paradoxical but deeply compelling perspective. If God is indeed the creator of time, then traditional questions like "Who created God?" merely misapply time-bound reasoning to a transcendent reality. In this light, our very questions are shaped by the limitations of human cognition, much like trying to explain an ocean entirely by the droplets in it.

This is not merely an academic debate; it roots itself in our deep-seated need to contextualize our experience of a cosmos, that is at once astonishingly orderly, yet profoundly mysterious. Einstein's view reflects a sort of cosmic humility—an acknowledgment that the Universe's underlying structure might be accessible only in broad strokes, beyond the reach of our everyday logic. Conversely, Hawking's model seeks comfort in consistency by reducing the miraculous to a chain of natural occurrences.

Moreover, the idea that mathematics might serve as a bridge to metaphysical truths is both profound and provocative. Mathematics, with its enigmatic beauty and precise consistency, can seem almost like a language in which the secrets of creation are penned. If a formula or set of equations could hint at a design or an intentional order, then it enriches the dialogue



between science and spirituality, suggesting that both domains might be different expressions of the same underlying reality.

To capture this interplay visually, consider the flow chart above:

In this diagram, both pathways—science and metaphysics verge toward a richer, more nuanced interpretation of existence. The scientific approach dissects and models, while the metaphysical lens invites us to embrace the mystery that might forever elude complete explanation.

This dialogue between reason and wonder does not just belong in academic journals or philosophical treatises. It affects how we live, how we interpret our place in the cosmos, and how we cope with the grand questions of existence. Whether one is stirred by the beauty of precise cosmic laws or by the idea of an eternal creator, both modes of understanding ultimately enhance our collective awe of the Universe.

Given the depth of these reflections, one might consider further questions: What does it mean to find comfort in the certainty of physical laws versus the mystery of a transcendent creator? Can science and spirituality coexist beneficially, each enriching the other rather than remaining in opposition? And how does our own experience of the cosmos—through art, personal insight, and even the unexpected alignment of events—shape our belief in one view or the other?

Conclusion

The exploration of the origin of the universe, life, and humanity invites a rich dialogue between science and religion. Each offers unique perspectives that enrich our understanding of existence. While science seeks to explain the physical universe, religion provides valuable insights into the existential and moral aspects of life. Reconciling these worldviews may not eliminate tensions, but it can foster a deeper understanding of the human experience. In recognizing the validity of both perspectives, we come to appreciate the profound questions of existence and our place in the vast universe.

This examination not only illuminates the diverse beliefs surrounding creation but also respects the complexities inherent in each perspective. Through ongoing dialogue and exploration, humanity can continue to navigate the intricate interplay of science and faith, enriching our understanding of both the cosmos and our role within it. The human brain, while capable of great things, is limited by its physical and cognitive framework, and finds it beyond its transcending comprehension to understand the omnipotent and omnipresent creator, who is beyond the universe and time, and has no beginning and end.

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(Dr. Mrs. Susan Eapen is a globally reputed plant biology and botany scientist and one of the pioneers in transgenic plant research. Stanford University included her among 2% of the World's top-ranking scientists in the "Plant Biology and Botany" category. She retired as a Senior Scientist from Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Mumbai, and currently serves as an Adjunct Professor at UC College, Aluva. She has also served as the President of Indian Women Scientists' Association. Dr. Eapen belongs to St. Thomas Orthodox Church, UC College, Alwaye.)

NEWS

Maharashtra Governor Inaugurates 'Druxit Summit'

In the backdrop of the liquor / drug menace assuming alarming proportions in recent times, the Malankara Orthodox Church, under the auspices of the Ministry of Human Empowerment, organized a one-day Conclave named DRUXIT SUMMIT at Catholicate Aramana, Devalokam, Kottayam, on 14 June 2025. The Conclave was conducted in two sessions - in the morning and afternoon. H.H. Baselios Marthoma Mathews III presided over both the sessions.

The morning session was inaugurated by the famous film director Shri. Blessy. Dr. Divya S. Iyer (Managing Director, Vizhinjam Seaport) delivered the keynote address. Following this, three papers were presented by Dr. Ruble Raj, Prof. C. Mamachen and Dr. Varghese P. Punnoose respectively. Fr. Dr. John Thomas Karingattil moderated the discussions.

The afternoon session was inaugurated by Shri C.P. Radhakrishnan, the Hon'ble Governor of Maharashtra. He said that the fight against drugs should begin from educational institutions. Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Barnabas, Suffragan Metropolitan, Most Rev. Mar Jacob Muricken, Rt. Rev. Dr. Malayil Sabu Koshy, Shri. Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan MLA and Shri. Shafeek Mannani, offered felicitations.

H.H. the Catholicos inaugurated the "Lahari Virudha Sandesha Yathra" launched by the Orthodox Christian Youth Movement. A Flash mob by the students of Baselius College, Kottayam, Mar Baselios Public School, Devalokam, St. Thomas Orthodox Church Sunday School, Velloor and members of the OCYM, added beauty and meaning to the event. H. G. Geevarghese Mar Coorilos (President, Ministry of Human Empowerment), Rev. Dr. Thomas Varghese Amayil (Priest Trustee), Shri Ronny Varghese Abraham (Lay Trustee), Adv. Biju Oommen (Association Secretary) and Fr. P. A. Philip (Director, MOHE) spoke on the occasion.

Observance of Green Lent

Kottayam: The Holy Episcopal Synod of the Malankara Orthodox Church (February 2025) called upon its members to observe 'Green Lent', an environmentally focused lent based on 7 themes. The major thrusts of the themes were Water conservation, Waste-reduction, Renewal of Environmental equilibrium, Energy conservation, Sustenance of Creation and Environment-friendly Road Traffic. In keeping with this initiative, activities based on the seven main thrusts, aimed at conservation of the environment, were promoted in all parishes during the seven-week Lenten period.

Plans included organizing Seminars on Water Conservation and Water Audit in all parishes and institutions of the church. His Grace Dr. Joseph Mar Dionysius, President of the Ecological Commission of the church, suggested that as part of waste management,

special attention be paid on placing waste bins in public places; organising awareness campaigns against source contamination; and making church buildings friendly for the physically challenged.

The Synod also emphasized the need to drastically reduce the use of disposable glasses and plates made of plastic and paper at church functions; and designate a day when Worship service would be conducted fully in candle light, thereby imparting a lesson on electricity usage reduction. A 'Car-less Sunday' to be observed to promote eco-friendly motoring, and Car-pooling to be encouraged so that neighbouring families can come to church together, thereby reducing dependence on fossil fuels, were also suggested.

eMGOCSM - An Online Ministry of MGOCSM

Over the years, there has been a significant increase in the migration of youngsters of our church who move to different cities in India & abroad to pursue higher education or for professional work. In this manner, they end up moving away from their homes and their home parishes as well.

e-MGOCSM has embarked on a mission to bridge this gap for our Orthodox members who are distanced from their local parishes by creating e-units and having online fellowship through e-MGOCSM.

By clicking on the E-MGOCSM registration link you can be part of this fellowship:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScw1v-IVfd983Kun8c4ksH6Xsf4fSuLWdWPmFhbwFEeMp5RcQ/viewform

Stay rooted in Christ and be connected to the MGOCSM family by joining *eMGOCSM- the online ministry dedicated to supporting you wherever you are. Wherever your journey takes you, the Church walks beside you.

For more details, reach out to the e-MGOCSM Helpdesk# : +91-99443-45298

Website: https://www.mgocsm.in/emgocsm

Youtube : https://www.youtube.com/@emgocsm

Orthodox Christian Youth Movement to launch Kerala Yatra against Drug Abuse Flag-off on July 4th in Kasaragod

Kottayam: The Orthodox Christian Youth Movement will be launching an Awareness Campaign Yatra in an effort to counter the rising menace of the use of drugs and narcotics in the society, especially among the youth. The Awareness Yatra, will start from Kasaragod on July 4, and conclude at Thiruvananthapuram on July 12th. Inaugurating the activities of the Anti-Drug Campaign at the central level, His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, said that it is commendable that the Youth Movement has adopted the church's anti-drug message for spreading awareness not only among the Orthodox youth across the country, but also for the whole society. The Youth Movement announced their decision of launching the Anti-Drug Campaign at the 'Druxit Summit for a Drug-Free Society', held at the Catholicate Palace, Devalokam, Kottayam.

His Grace Dr. Geevarghese Mar Yulios, President of the Youth Movement said that a widespread anti-drug campaign would be organized under the leadership of various dioceses and units at the parish level and for

the general public.

Film Director and Screenwriter Mr. Blessy, Dr. Divya S. Iyer, MD, Vizhinjam Port; Episcopal Synod Secretary Dr. Yuhanon Mar Chrysostomos; HG Geevarghese Mar Koorilos, Metropolitan Bombay Diocese; Malankara Association Secretary Adv. Biju Oommen, Priest Trustee Fr. Dr. Thomas Varghese Amayil, Lay Trustee Mr. Rony Varghese Abraham; Youth Movement Central Vice President Fr. Jain C. Mathew, General Secretary Fr. Viju Elias, Treasurer Renju M. Joy, Pearl Kanneth, Abu Veerappally, Eldhose Prince, Danny Raju, Jijo George, Nikhil K Joy, Eldhose George, Nibin Nalla Thamula, Rohit John, Aneesh Jacob, Abi Abraham Koshy, Geevis Marcos, Ashwin Vadakkedath, Robin Joe Varghese, Josely Mariam, and Bibin Karuvatta spoke at the inauguration.

Annual Meeting of the Akhila Malankara Prayer Group Association

HH Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, inaugurated the Annual Meeting of Akhila Malankara Prayer Group Association at St. Thomas Cathedral, Chakkupallam, Kungiripetti, Idukki. More than 1500 delegates from 20 dioceses of the Malankara Orthodox Church attended the annual meeting.

Empowering Parents is the Need of the Hour: Dr. Sabu Thomas

Dr. Sabu Thomas, former Vice-Chancellor of Mahatma Gandhi University and a distinguished scientist, emphasized the urgent need to empower parents in order to effectively address the social challenges of our times. He was speaking at the inaugural session of a workshop for 'parent empowerment' trainers, jointly organized by Sopana Orthodox Academy and Sahayathra Kootayma at Mar Baselios Dayara, Njaliyakuzhy, Kottayam on May 21.

Dr. Sabu Thomas said that "Social issues such as drug abuse and violence are not isolated problems. The family environment in which a child is raised plays a critical role, and that's where the importance of parent empowerment becomes evident,". He also stressed the importance of ensuring that children receive training in sports, arts, and literature alongside formal education.

The event was presided over by Fr. Dr. K.M. George, Chairman of Sopana Academy. Speeches were also delivered by Dr. M.S. John, Dr. Susy Kurian, Dr. Leju P. Thomas, Dr. Jacob John, Prof. C. Mamachan, Fr. Abraham Vazhakal, and Lijo Varghese.

On the occasion, Dr. Sabu Thomas released the book 'Francis Marpapa: Ardratayude Aalroopam' (Pope Francis: An Embodiment of Compassion), authored by Fr. Dr. K.M. George, and handed over the first copy to V. Rev. Matthai Ramban.

The workshop concluded with the consensus that what society needs today is not just advice, but meaningful guidance and living examples.

The training was conducted in various sessions by experts Dr. Ajith R. Pillai (Educationist): Different Parenting Styles and Effective Parenting Strategies; Mr. Amal C.P. (Counselling Expert): Various Stages of Child Development. Fr. Dr. Bijesh Philip (Theological Seminary, Kottayam): The Role of Parents in

Value-Based Character Formation of Children; and Shri Preeth Chandanapally, (Educator), outlined the Future objectives, action plans, and methods to be adopted.

A total of 35 trainees participated, all of whom expressed interest in future initiatives.

The first activity, as per the workshop is scheduled to be held at M.D. Higher Secondary School, Kottayam, following the management's approval to proceed, with subsequent programmes planned at various schools.

The Camp for Orthodox Leadership Training (COLT)

The Camp for Orthodox Leadership Training (COLT) was held at the Old Seminary's historic Sophia Centre from May 18-25, 2025. Thirty youth aged between 17 -35 attended the camp. Similarly, FAM-COLT was held at Mar Baselious Dayara, Njaliakuzhy near Kottayam from May 29 till June 1. Nine couples and 2 single people joined with their families to live out Christian ethics and re-evaluate the quality of their married lives.

COLT is a 35-year-old annual leadership camp which began in 1989, and has produced hundreds of dynamic, Spirit-filled young Orthodox Christian Leaders, both men and women, who are all over the world in positions of secular and Church leadership. There are 3 offshoots of COLT: COLT, FAM-COLT, and TEEN-COLT.

During all COLT's, the participants have always had days of learning in a fun atmosphere, and received hands-on experience while going on pilgrimages to ancient churches, monasteries and fun places like a beach or the elephant yard near Guruvayur. Learning was always through interactive sessions by eminent Church gurus, e.g., Metropolitans Mar Melitius and Mar Eusebius, Fr. Dr. K.M. George, Fr. Dr. Reji Mathew, Very Rev M.P. George, Cor Episcopa, Fr. Rijo Geevarghese, etc., take sessions. All the sessions were stitched together by Fr Philip and Ms. Bibi Kuruvilla, [e.g., Leadership Skills, Games and Open Discussions on Critical Issues that Teenagers face], plus guiding them into spiritual disciplines through morning meditations, Holy Confession and Holy Qurbana. All were aimed at bringing participants up to their own highest potential. End result? Young Leaders who are trained and prepared for taking the MOSC into the future.

TEEN COLT is for Orthodox Teenagers studying in the Gulf Countries, UK, Europe. It is a camp where Teenagers can imbibe the ethos of Orthodoxy and learn about the holy Mother Church in an atmosphere that is deeply spiritual, and yet fun.

This year, TEEN COLT will be held from July 10 -13, 2025. For Details and Application Forms, WhatsApp/contact: Fr. Dr. Philip Kuruvilla: [+91] 9823152313.

Iconography Workshop Concludes at Sopana Orthodox Academy

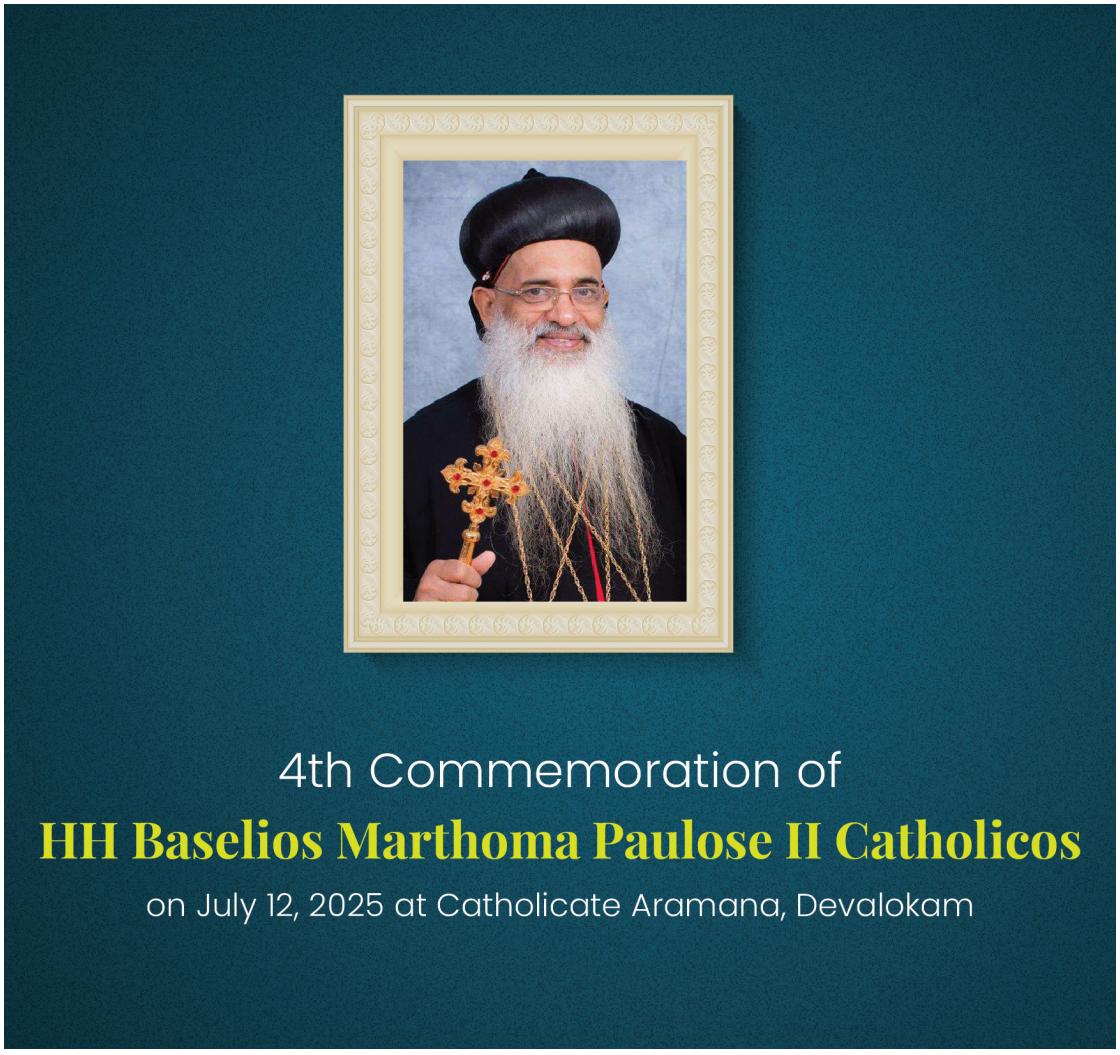
The fourth edition of the Iconography Workshop at Sopana Orthodox Academy concluded gracefully after a spiritually enriching week of learning, prayer, and reflection. This workshop, jointly organized by Sopana Orthodox Academy and Project Graphē, brought together eight passionate participants from different parts of the world, united by their devotion to the sacred artistic tradition of the Church.

Conducted on a regular basis, the workshop aims to explore sacred art as an integral

expression of the Church's liturgical life, with a particular emphasis on promoting indigenous artistic expressions. Beyond technical instruction in iconography, the program serves as a space for prayerful creation, theological reflection, and artistic fellowship.

Participants departed carrying not only their completed icons but also a deeper understanding of the profound connection between sacred art and Orthodox faith — where every brushstroke becomes a prayer and each image, a silent theology. The concluding session was blessed with the presence of Fr. Dr. K. M. George, Director of Sopana Orthodox Academy, and Very Rev. Mathukutty Ramban. Fr. Rijo Geevarghese served as the instructor for the workshop.

Through initiatives like this, Sopana Orthodox Academy continues its commitment to nurturing and preserving the artistic and theological heritage of the Church, fostering spaces where faith and creativity meet.



The Malankara Orthodox Church Council of Bombay

Diocese of Bombay

Congratulations

students, staff & parents

XIIth Standard Results 2024 - '25

100% PASS RESULT

H.G Geevarghese Mar Coorilos
Metropolitan, President

HG Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theophilos
Metropolitan, Vice President

COMMERCE TOPPER

96.11%

St. Mary's School, Valsad
(State Board)

TANISHA MAISURIYA

96.25%

St. Mary's ICSE School, Koparkhairane
(ISC)

SCIENCE TOPPER

ASMI JAIN

95.00%

COMMERCE TOPPER

SANVI GORI SHANKER CHUGH

97.75%

HUMANITIES TOPPER

AMOGH SANDEEP PAHURKAR

SCIENCE TOPPER

94.50%

SHETTY NIREEKSHA JAGADISH

COMMERCE TOPPER

94.17%

SAPKAL ARYAN YOGESH

COMMERCE TOPPER

94.17%

SHETTY KSHRITIJ SANTOSH

St. Mary's Junior College, Vashi
(State Board)

Secretary: **Fr. Thomas K. Chacko** Chief Executive Officer: **Fr. Abraham Joseph**
Orthodox Church Centre, Sector 10-A, Mar Theophilus Marg, Vashi, Navi Mumbai 400 703

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Congratulations

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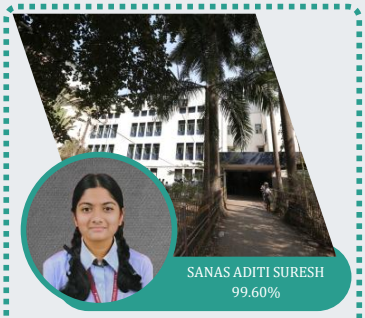
Xth Standard Results 2024 – '25

100% PASS RESULT

ARSH HEMRAJ CHAUDHARI
100.00%

St. Mary's ICSE School, Koparkhairane
Global 1st Rank for third time
88% Distinction



SANAS ADITI SURESH
99.60%

St. Mary's Multipurpose School & Junior College, Vashi (State Board)
79% Distinction

JHA ANKIT SHIVKUMAR
91.80%

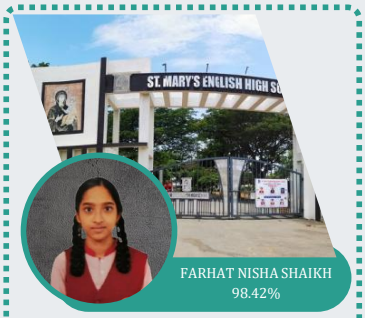
St. Mary's Tejaswani School, Vashi
(Free School – State Board)
38% Distinction

AARYA MILIND MHATRE
97.80%

St. Mary's JNP School, Uran (State Board)
59% Distinction

PARTH PRASHANT SANYASI
98.60%

Dr. Mar Theophilus ICSE School, Dhanori
74% Distinction



FARHAT NISHA SHAIKH
98.42%

St. Mary's School, Valsad (State Board)
39% Distinction

JATIN CHHANGANI
98.40%

St. Thomas High School, Kalyan (State Board)
86% Distinction

ANIMESH SINGH
97.6%

St. Thomas Public School, Khadki (State Board)
68% Distinction

RIDDHI SHEDGE
97.4%

Gregorian Public School, Roha (CBSE)
55% Distinction

Secretary: **Fr. Thomas K. Chacko** Chief Executive Officer: **Fr. Abraham Joseph**
Orthodox Church Centre, Sector 10-A, Mar Theophilus Marg, Vashi, Navi Mumbai 400 703

August 15

Dormition of St. Mary

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.
For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant;
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.
For He who is mighty has done great things for me,
And holy is His name."

St.Luke 1:46-49